

RETYPE FROM ORIGINAL
Quarterly Conference meeting July 30, 1901

Comments by Chairman Leavett at First Quarterly Conference

In opening the conference speaking to the superintendents Mr. Leavett said:

There are several matters we wish to confer with you about, one perhaps as important as any is the attitude of the Board of Control towards yourselves as superintendents and toward the institutions over which you reside. It was said at the time the bill establishing this Board was before the Legislature that if it should become a law and a board of control were appointed in pursuance to its terms, it would be a board of business men who would look only at one side of the great problem, that of the question of dollars and cents, and that they would lose sight of the requirements of the institutions and the comfort and happiness of the inmates and unfortunate people over whom the state exercises its protecting control and for whose welfare and maintenance it so munificently provides. I think I may say, gentlemen, that the members of the Board of Control take a much broader view of this great question than that placed in our minds and hearts by the opponents of the bill before we received our appointment. We believe that money can be saved by the introduction of different methods in the purchase of supplies and the management of the institutions, but that is only a minor part of the great duties and responsibilities that rest upon the Board of Control and upon you gentlemen, in a still greater degree. In saying this we do not wish to be understood as criticizing the past, for such is neither our wish or intention. It is a new proposition that confronts us of which more should and will be expected.

It must be and is a source of pride and gratification to the people of this state, and to you gentlemen as well, that the change from the old to the new, from the obsolete to the progressive, from the many boards to the one, has not been brought about because of any scandal or defalcation, but by reason of the evolution of public opinion upon this matter and a due regard for the well being of the state and its dependent people. The question of the acts of the Board of Control, its discharge of the great trust imposed upon it, and of the effect it will have upon the different institutions, is yet to be determined, I will however, say for and in behalf of the members of this board that we look upon our position as a sacred trust to be faithfully discharged unbiased by sectarian or political influence and regardless of personal considerations and consequences.

In our sister states of Wisconsin and Iowa they have similar laws and similar boards to ours and so far they have been successful and eminently satisfactory to the people of those states. We believe that it will be equally so here, but in order that it may be we also believe that we must have the hearty cooperation, sympathy and assistance of our superintendents and each and every of the state employees under them. We are glad to be able to say that so far we have not seen the slightest indication of a disposition on the part of any superintendent or warden in charge of the state institutions other than that of a hearty cooperation and manifest intent on their part to do everything possible to make not only the Board of Control idea a success but to make their institutions better in every way than they are or have been in the past, if it is possible to do so.

The first and most important matter to be determined by the board was, who should be held responsible to us for the management of the different institutions. We found that in some of the institutions there had grown up a divided responsibility; that while the person in charge was in name superintendent over all of the institution, as a matter of fact there were some employees who not only deemed themselves equal in responsibility and authority to the superintendent, but exercised such authority as well. The board speedily determined that it would hold but one person responsible in any institution and should be the superintendent. In order that we might justly hold the superintendents responsible we gave them to understand very early in our official life that there would be no removal except for cause and only upon charges being preferred and a hearing given them.

While I do not think it necessary, I feel perhaps it is well to reiterate on behalf of the board. That no person will be removed by this board except for cause. We also believe that in order to justify us in holding you responsible you should have absolute control of every employee in your institution, and we so stated to you in a general circular letter, and to that position we shall rigidly adhere. We shall hold you responsible for every employee in your institution and for that reason you are to make all appointments, without suggestion or influence from this board and, we trust, from no one else or source except your own knowledge of the requirements of your institution and the qualities that you desire such employees to possess.

We think it advisable that employment should be furnished for all inmates where it is possible to do so. It is quite likely that in some instances it would be advisable to carry on some manufacturing industry even at a loss to the state if by so doing it will be beneficial to the inmates and make them more happy and contented with their sad lot. We desire to have the superintendents during the coming year keep an accurate account of all the manufacturing departments in their establishments, being careful to give each credit for all that it produces and that all expenses be charged against it. We presume that this is already done in many cases but if there are cases where it has not been done we request that it may be attended to hereafter. Having this purpose in view, will you please take this question under consideration and make such report to the board concerning your particular institutions as your judgment may dictate.

In making up your estimates we would like to have uniformity in the article asked for as far as possible. It seems to us that if this is done we can buy to much better advantage, being able to buy in larger quantities, with equally good results at the several institutions. If you were to look over the schedules that have come in to us under this quarter's estimates you would undoubtedly be surprised at the variety of articles that are asked for, which is not saying that any of them are unnecessary. You have grown into the habit of purchasing certain articles of a certain kind or quality and, like anyone else under similar circumstances, you naturally make your first estimate to the Board for the kind and character of goods that you have been accustomed to buy. For illustration, you might, it seems to us, have perfect uniformity in the three insane hospitals in your schedule of dry goods, boots and shoes, groceries, drugs and medicines, meats etc. As far as possible we wish the superintendents to take these matters up amongst themselves and the board will give any assistance possible. If, however, you take this matter up and work it out independently of the Board, we think it will be more satisfactory to you and

just as well and perhaps better for the institutions. The same may be said of the prison and reformatory, asylums, normal schools etc.

It has been brought to our attention that there is a great difference in the amount of food consumed at the different state institutions, some consuming a great many more pounds of the same kind of food per capita than others. We believe, also, that the excessive use of some articles of food is detrimental to the health of the inmates. These are matters which the Board of Control intend to take up as soon as it can do so. This subject is, however, clearly within the province of the true physician and we can invite your earnest application to a matter of no greater importance than the solution of the problem of a healthy, satisfactory and economical dietary for our institutions.

In considering the question of supplies, there is another point which should be mentioned and that is the question of how far the state is justified in providing luxuries at our institutions, either for the table or furnishings, beyond the quality and character that the average citizen in good circumstances would be able to furnish for his own house or table. I suggest this question as something worthy the consideration of our superintendents, whether or not there is a point beyond which the state should not go in providing luxuries for our institutions, and if there is such a point we would be very glad to have you gentlemen determine for us, or rather recommend to us, where that point ends and where extravagance would begin.

In making up estimates, we find in many cases you have designated the kind of goods you wanted perhaps from the stock number of the business house or firm from which you have formerly purchased and also that there is a lack of detail. For instance, someone asks for so many dozen gloves without designating whether they were for men or boys, lined or unlined, leather or woolen, or in what kind of work they were

to be used. When a wholesale house receives a schedule with such descriptions they are unable to determine what quality or size is wanted and hence are handicapped in bidding on the same. So far as possible, in making up estimates we wish you to avoid any particular manufacturer's goods, that is the designation by the trade brand that but one manufacturer can use, or any brand of goods that are put up by any particular house. We want schedules so formulated that all may know what we want, giving each person or firm the fullest opportunity to compete for the patronage of the state upon equal terms.

It would not be out of place to mention also the reason why there has been some delay in sending out the salary lists to the different institutions. We did not feel that this could be safely done until some rules had been adopted for the government of the institutions and some knowledge obtained of those employees whose duties and salaries must necessarily be changed from what they have been by reason of the fact that the responsibility heretofore required of them will be in a large measure eliminated. For instance, stewards have been purchasing agents under the old system; under the new system, the only purchasing agent will be the superintendent of the institution, who will purchase from the contingent fund that will be placed in his hands only such goods as are directed by the board. We hesitated about defining the duties of stewards under the new regulations until we had a consultation with you, gentlemen, because of your superior knowledge of the workings of your institutions. Until we could have such conference, we felt that we could not make a rule to send out for the government of your institutions or as to what the duties of any one of your employees should be. For these reasons the salary

lists have been delayed. We hope to have opportunity to take these matters up with you to-day.

Thanking you gentlemen for your kind attention and for the evident earnestness with which you are taking up your work under the new system, and again assuring you of our hearty cooperation in any changes or methods that promise the amelioration of the condition of the state's unfortunates or the better administration of the business affairs of our institutions, we will now proceed the work that has called us together.

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